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TRANS VISIBILITY

Define ‘Woman’

The new ‘gotcha’ phrase by transphobes — and a full answer



Cassie Brighter · [Follow](#)

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42



A few days ago there was an odd moment in the hearings to confirm Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson as a Supreme Justice. She was asked to define “Woman.” It was a clearly rehearsed, strategic question to elicit a bad outcome for the Judge. It was meant to hit the media as a sound clip: These crazy libtards can’t even define “woman.” Predictably, Tucker Carlson did a whole number with this.

Here’s the clip:

Sen. Blackburn asks Supreme Court nominee to define 'woman' | USA TOD...



I think the strategy worked. The way Marsha Blackburn framed it was insidiously clever. While the Judge responded with a reasoned, accurate answer, this moment delivered the ingredients which people like Tucker Carlson could then cook up into the following premise:

“The Right asks a basic, simple question — ‘what is a woman.’ The Left can’t even provide a simple answer.”

It works.

And also, it’s a fallacy.

Fallacies are disingenuous arguments meant to bias a debate. The question is a “gotcha” question — it creates a framework that predisposes a good outcome for your side, and puts the opposing side in a position where ANY answer from the opposing side leads to a bad outcome for them.

Loaded questions are often inflammatory in nature, making them an effective way to derail an otherwise rational debate, as the recipient may be quick to become defensive.

The Judge did right in providing a rational response. However, this is what I would've said — *have* said — in answer to this question.

Definitions evolve over time, context and purpose

Definitions evolve over time. “*Car*” used to mean *a wooden carriage pulled by a horse*. Nowadays it means *a metal machine pulled by its own engine*. Language evolves. Also, words can have several definitions depending on context, circumstance, and intended purpose.

If you ask for a current definition, in some contexts it just means “*vehicle*” (your ride, your wheels). In some other contexts “*car*” means a specific set or type of street-legal vehicle (sedan, convertible, coupe, sports car) — excluding other types. Wikipedia says an SUV is a car — Cars.com says it's not.

Furthermore, everyone refers to toy cars as “cars” — even though they’re definitely not street-legal, and cannot carry passengers. And though golf carts are not considered cars — because they’re not street-legal, Formula One cars ARE cars — even though they’re not street-legal either.

What is a woman?

The word has a long history and the definitions change over time. Originally, it simply meant “*the one who grinds the grain.*” (“*wiif*” evolved to *wife*, and melted into “*wo-*”) But surely that meaning is outdated. Most of my friends haven’t ground any grain in some time.

Historical/Traditional Definitions

(European, Middle-Eastern, and most Asian traditions)

Another longstanding historical definition was “*the one with the womb.*” But not just that — it also meant “the one who’s destined to be subjugated to a man. First the father, then the husband. The one who doesn’t get to decide things. The one who is considered chattel property. The one whom the husband gets to fuck whenever he so desires, even if she really, really doesn’t want to. The one who cannot go to school. The one who must stay in a special tent outside the village when she bleeds. The one who cannot attend school. The one who can be beaten for being a ‘difficult’ or ‘disobedient’ wife.” Also see: “*the one who’s barefoot, pregnant, and in the kitchen.*”

Conservatives (aka regressives) seem to be fighting hard to bring this version of woman back. (See the draconian laws in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Wisconsin.)

News > World > Americas > US politics

Marjorie Taylor Greene mocked over her definition of a woman – the ‘weaker sex’ created from Adam’s rib

Users criticise Republican for ‘setting women’s rights movements back by decades’

Maroosha Muzaffar • 3 days ago



Sen. Marjorie Taylor Greene recently told the Georgia Republican Assembly, “I’m going to tell you right now what is a woman. We came from Adam’s rib. God created us with his hands. We may be the weaker sex, we are the weaker sex, but we are our partner’s, our husband’s, wife.”

Progressives, Liberals, Feminists since the 1600s or even earlier have been pushing against these definitions of ‘woman’ as a caste. Feminists have pushed for changes to the societal definition of ‘woman’ by campaigning for women’s right to vote, women’s right to drive, women’s right to walk in public unescorted by a man, women’s right to own property, women’s right to make decisions in a great number of social spheres.

Biological/Anatomical Definitions

Of course, conservatives will demand the **biological** definition.

Definitions are not absolutes. When defining a type of human or anything else, we need to remember the word “**MOST**.”

Words like ‘usually,’ ‘generally,’ ‘frequently,’ ‘in most cases,’ are vital in definitions. Nuance is vital. “The sky is blue” is true at a simplistic level — but it’s also black at

night. It may be orange, pink and purple at sunset. It's gray during Seattle winters. A more accurate statement would be "the sky is generally blue."

Biology is a nuanced and complex science. When speaking about biology, this nuance is essential. Here are some examples:

Most African people are dark-skinned and brown-eyed... except Africans with albinism. Albino Africans are extremely light-skinned; and due to prejudice and superstition, this often proves deadly. In some regions they might be killed as infants, or shunned, to prevent bad luck. In some other regions, they're hunted down, their body parts used for magic. Albinism is rare — 1 in every 5,000. However, with Africa's population at 1,2 billion, there are over 240,000 albino folks in Africa — and many of them live in fear for their lives, simply because of prejudice and ignorance.

Most African people are dark-skinned and brown-eyed... except in Ethiopia. Ethnically, the skin of the Nilotes of South Sudan is very dark — the darkest in all of Africa. Conversely, people in Ethiopia have the lightest skin in all of Africa. (Well, **most** people in Ethiopia. Mursi people, also in Ethiopia, tend to have dark skin.)

Most African people are dark-skinned and brown-eyed... except when they don't. Over 400,000 Africans are blue-eyed.

Assumptions are made about blue-eyed African people. An Igbo couple was shocked recently when they saw their blonde, blue-eyed baby. A Nigerian father left his wife and children because of their blue eyes. Blue-eyed people are often demonized, cast aside, and 'othered.' Considering a history of genocide and massive trauma as a result of white colonizers, African people react with suspicion, thinking there's been some misdeed — adultery, sexual pandering to a white man, etc. In reality, the most common reason some African people have blue eyes is a genetic mutation (OCA2) that causes people to have blue eyes. The same mutation that causes blue eyes in Europe, Asia, and other regions. Less frequent in Africa, but just as real.

That's why it's important to say **MOST** African people have dark eyes. *Usually*, they do. In **most** cases. Just not always.



MOST people in Africa have dark eyes. However, some African people (and some Asian, and some Afghani folks) have blue, or green, eyes.

Women and Biology

- **Sexual dimorphism:** The differences in size, form and features between sexes. (Note: In contrast to the dramatic dimorphism in other animal species, humans are very mildly dimorphic — evidenced almost exclusively in reproductive organs, mammary glands, and minute differences in strength and size.)
- **Cisgender** (cis: near, on this side + gender) — a person whose sexual dimorphism aligns with their gender.

- **Transgender:** (trans: across, away from + gender) — a person whose sexual dimorphism does not align with their gender.

Most (and the word “most” is vital here) women have vaginas. 98% or more of all women were born with vaginas. **Most** cisgender women are born with vaginas, and **some** trans women are able to receive a vagina through surgery. (Let’s not forget that over 50 million transgender men — and **many** of them still have a vagina.)

Some cisgender women are born without a vagina (MRKH). This syndrome is rare — only 1 in 4,500 women have this. But that’s nearly A MILLION women (more than the entire population of Alaska).

Some cis women have TWO vaginas (vaginal septum). Some women are born with TWO uteruses (uterine didelphys). These are two of the seven documented types of Müllerian duct anomalies (unusual configurations of the sexual organs). Over 100 MILLION women have some type of Müllerian anomaly.

I Have 2 Separate Vaginas | BORN DIFFERENT



Most women have vulvas. **Some** cis women don't have vulvas because they've been castrated (FGM). **Some** cis women lose part of their vagina or their vulva to cancer. **Some** trans women do not have vulvas (surgeries can be expensive, or simply inaccessible in many countries). All of these are women.

Most women have ovaries. **In most cases**, cis women are born with ovaries. **In most cases**, trans women are born with testicles, and many remove these through surgery. **Some** cis women are born with internal testicles. **Some** cis women are born with one ovary, or none. **Some** cis women have had them removed through surgery. They're still women.

Some women have breasts. Some have large breasts, some have small breasts. Some have hardly any breast tissue at all. They're still women.

Some people are Intersex.

Some intersex people are women. Some are men, and some are non-binary

Intersex is not a social construct, or an ideology, or even a gender identity. Intersex is an infrequent biological configuration, where a person's body has both 'male' AND 'female' features, making it difficult to determine their sex based on chromosomes or by examining external or internal sexual organs. Examples medical classifications of intersex types are androgen insensitivity, congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH), 5-alpha reductase deficiency, gonadal mosaicism, and Klinefelters syndrome.

A note on chromosomes:

One of the arguments conservatives like to cling to is that women have XX chromosomes, men have XY chromosomes. **Generally**, humans have 46 pairs of chromosomes, arranged in 23 pairs. The two chromosomes that govern the configuration of the reproductive system are called allosomes. **Most** (remember *most*?) individuals we call female have two X chromosomes, and **most** individuals we deem male have an X chromosome along with a Y chromosome. However, there are individuals born with only 45

chromosomes (X), with 47 chromosomes (XXY, XYY, XXX) or even with 48 (XXXX, XXXY, XXYY).

So, if you're reading this and you're cocksure (pardon the pun) that it's all about the chromosomes, let me ask you this: Do you know what sex chromosomes you have? (This reminds me about racists taking the 23andMe genetic test and finding out they have African or Jewish ancestry. Awkward!)

Intersex variations are present in many animal species. And to make it even more interesting, birds don't even have XX / XY chromosomes — they have ZZ and ZW. And the platypus has 10 sex chromosomes (most male platypodes have XYXYXYXYXY).

What Was Done To These Intersex People Was Not Okay | Teen Vogue



Philosophical/Ideological Definitions

Judith Butler, Ph.D. claims that gender is performative — that we establish our gender through our actions and interactions with society. One way to look at this idea is that a farmer is a farmer because she farms. She farms because she is somehow drawn to farming. Therefore she has learned how to farm, and so she farms. She owns a farm because it allows her to farm. Presumably, she enjoys farming to some lesser or greater degree. In the same capacity, a woman “*womans*.” (Note: this is my own somewhat whimsical interpretation of Butler’s books, Gender Trouble and Bodies That Matter.)

For anyone seeking to dive deeper into this, great places to start are [Kimberlé Crenshaw's TED talks](#), Julia Serano's [Whipping Girl](#), and the poetry of [Audre Lorde](#), [Gloria Anzaldúa](#), and [Cherrie Moraga](#).

Societal Definition

Societally, the question of what is a woman is under revision. Conservatives want to keep it as it was, historically, in Euro-centric culture — a person with a womb. And some conservatives really want the FULL old definition — a servant of men, a submissive assistant who cleans the house, raises the kids, and doesn't have opinions. This is deeply evident in Texas, with ridiculously draconian laws to remove women's agency over their lives. Liberals and intersectional feminists prefer a model where people are allowed autonomy over their lives. (It's so deeply ironic and disingenuous that the Republican party, claiming to be the party of self-subsistence, rugged autonomy and smaller government, now proposes a model where the government is scrutinizing children's genitals, and policing women's wombs!)

Progressives believe what matters is **not** the parts — it's the deep certainty of oneself, the self-knowledge that comes from deep within ourselves. A trans girl may know, to the core of her five-year-old being, that she's a girl. OR, she may just feel less comfortable with "boy stuff," and look with longing at the other side of the schoolyard, where the girls are playing. She may not have the language. She may be growing up in such a repressed, transphobic

environment (as it was in my case) that she may not even know an option of living as a girl is available to her.

Identity isn't simply a self-contained unit. It is a relationship between people and history, people and communities, people and institutions. — Kimberlé Crenshaw

A cisgender woman is a TYPE of woman

We've lived for centuries in a society that centers some people, and puts other people in the margins. A man is not THE archetypical human being — a man is one type of human being. He's a male human being. White people are not archetypical human beings — they're one type of people.

A white woman is a TYPE of woman

During a women's convention in Akron, Ohio in 1851, a very tall, gaunt, Black former slave got up to talk. This was viewed by many as an invasion, as an outrage. Many asked the event organizers to not allow this Black person to talk. As she took to the podium, Sojourner Truth gave her famous speech, with the repeated refrain "*Ain't I a woman?*" Her speech was more eloquent than that of any other at that gathering. And yet even recently bell hooks repudiated white feminism for its lack of Black inclusion. The work of bell hooks informed Kimberlé Crenshaw in her own concepts of intersectional feminism — the notion that some people stand at an intersection of two or more discriminations. A Black woman is a woman, and also Black. She

endures misogyny AND racism. A trans woman is a woman, and also Trans. She endures misogyny AND transphobia.

On Intersectionality in Feminism and Pizza | Akilah Obviously



Florida's "Don't Say Gay" Law

Conservatives believe you can turn a straight boy gay, or turn him into a trans girl, by exposing him to books, TV shows, or movies. This is a very uninformed, very misguided notion. We know for a fact that aversion therapy does not work on gay kids. You can't turn a gay kid straight — not even with bullying, gaslighting, abuse. Not even with torture. What are the

chances, then, of a straight kid reading a book and deciding to switch orientation or gender?

I grew up in Argentina during a military dictatorship, I was not even a little bit aware of the existence of LGBTQIA people — with the exception of vulgar, threatening, nasty graffiti in male public bathrooms. Horrible hateful words aimed at “putos” (fags). I grew up knowing that *whatever those people are*, I certainly do not want to be one of them. At eleven, during a family vacation in Argentina, I saw the cover of a tabloid, highlighting the “sex change” of a young trans woman. It stopped me in my tracks. (“*You can do that??*”) Still, I didn’t “*turn*” trans. It took decades, and some life events, before I couldn’t take it anymore, and dove into my transition — even though I knew I’d be losing so much, enduring so much, putting my life at risk.

You can’t “keep” a trans kid from being trans. What you CAN do is create a closeted, self-hating trans kid, who will go on to be a closeted, self-hating trans adult.

“Facts over feelings”

Transgender experience IS a fact — confirmed by scientists for over a century.

- *Transgender Facts* — Mayo Clinic

- *“I’m XY and I Know It”: Sex Determination Systems 101* — Harvard University
- *Sex isn’t binary, and we should stop acting like it is* — Massive Science
- *Better mental health found among transgender people who started hormones as teens* — Stanford University School of Medicine
- *What does the scholarly research say about the effect of gender transition on transgender well-being?* — Cornell University
- *Stop Using Phony Science to Justify Transphobia* — Scientific American

Gender Identity is NOT a “feeling” — as conservatives like to dismiss it. It’s an **internal certainty**. Just like being left-handed, or being autistic, or other internal markers of self. I CAN write with my right hand. Awkwardly. Slowly. But it doesn’t feel right. I feel comfortable and natural when I write with my left hand. I don’t “feel” I’m left-handed, I know it.

I know I’m not a *cisgender* woman. I don’t claim to be. I’ve always known, with some degree of grief, that I cannot birth a child. But I know I’m NOT a *man*. The way I see the world, the people I choose to befriend, the way I want to be seen and treated, the way I experience myself when I’m by myself deep in nature, with no one in sight, are all FEMALE. I experience the world through a female lens.

Aspiring, Becoming, Learning, Being

A debate exists, even among trans women, about how we talk about our transition. I believe it's an individual thing, different for each of us. I believe in my case the label of 'woman' was first aspirational — as I started my journey I was a child who *yearned* to experience life as a woman but didn't know she could. Raised as a boy, I did not know the full weight of the experiences and struggles of women. Along my journey, I slowly *became*, blossomed into being visibly a woman. And I *learned* the hardships, the challenges endured by women. Some of these are specific to cis women — I don't claim to experience these. But I've grown a much deeper empathy for experiences such as endometriosis, PMDD, peri-menopause, etc. through intimate congregational experiences with my cis women friends. And some of these are NOT unique to cis women. Patriarchy, misogyny, objectification, and harassment of women are still very, very much in play in this society — and I experience these directly these days. I've been physically attacked and I've been sexually assaulted. I walk home with my keys between my knuckles, and I worry when strange men approach me at night. However, these days I also get to be a mother to my children. I experience the deep bond of female friendships. I get to experience love as a woman. These days **I AM a woman.**

Let's talk about what a woman ISN'T

A woman is not a sex toy for men. A woman is not a walking womb for men to control. A woman is not the sole worker maintaining the household or the

only caregiver for the kids. A woman is not a resource entitled men can gain access to, through charm, coercion, deceit or violence. A woman is not a second-class citizen in a caste system that has men on top.

She is the only person who has authority over her womb or her body.

She is the only person who has authority over her destiny.

She is capable of leadership, wisdom, power.

A woman is a full human being.

Western colonization, patriarchy, and the gender binary

All of these conversations above assume the Euro-centric view of gender is universal and represents the “absolute order of things.” **It's not.**



Most indigenous societies across the globe have long recognized that gender is a spectrum, broader than just “boy/girl.” They’ve recognized NUANCE. (There is more than “day/night” — there is also dusk, dawn, sunset and morning.) The Hawaiians have several genders — *kane*, *wahine* and *mahu*. The Zapotec people in SouthWest Mexico have *hombre*, *muxe*, *mujer*. In Indonesia, the Bugi people (a highly influential and important ethnic group comprising six million people) firmly hold a framework of five genders: *makkunrai*, *oroané*, *bissu*, *calabai*, and *calalai*. Native-American nations each had terminology for multiple genders (these days most use the term Two-Spirit for individuals outside the gender binary). India has always had the Hijra. Samoans have Fa’afafine.

The gender binary is a Judeo-Christian (and Roman) over-simplified framework that enables MEN to **own and control** women.

The gender binary is a Judeo-Christian (and Roman) over-simplified framework that enables MEN to own and control women.

The Gender Binary as a Tool of Oppression

The gender binary was weaponized to justify colonization. The argument was that Europeans were so much more civilized, so much closer to God, than the “*savages*” who embraced gender nuances. This allowed Europeans to sell the idea of European Supremacy, which allowed the global super-genocide, torture and enslavement of Indigenous people around the world.

Transphobia is a White Supremacist Legacy of Colonialism

I still remember the first time I dressed in clothing not socially marked as acceptable for a “boy” to wear. In the...

medium.com

European colonizers marked Indigenous gender and sexual variance as inferior for the purposes of asserting their white cisgender heterosexual manhood as the pinnacle of human existence. — Michael Paramo

The Vatican fears trans people will “*annihilate nature.*” Nah. It would take galactic amounts of antimatter, and fission reactions larger than several galaxies to annihilate nature. I don’t believe my hormone pills can do that. However, if by “*nature*” they mean obsolete, oppressive, harmful, patriarchal colonialist structures, then yes, by all means, let’s annihilate that.

I love the way Anne Hathaway put it:

Anne Hathaway Honoured With National Equality Award
Academy Award-winning actress Anne Hathaway makes an emotional pledge while accepting the HRC National Equality...
www.youtube.com

Anne Hathaway speaks about the myth of patriarchy, white supremacy, hetero & cisgender normativity.

Also, this:

I think one of the reasons why the idea of being transgender, being non-binary, is so threatening, so upsetting to a lot of conservatives — especially conservative evangelicals — is because so much of their worldview is based on a capitalistic patriarchy. and coding men and women by hair, clothes, shoes,

voice, makeup, is an easy way for them to distinguish between competition and consumables. — TikTok creator [@deconstructivecriticism](#)

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Read:

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- *[Gender Diversity in Jewish Sacred Texts](#) — Keshet Online*

- *Indigenous Sexualities: Resisting Conquest and Translation* — *E-InternationalRelations.org*
- *Ancient Persians Recognized At Least Three Genders* — *IFL Science*
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Written by Cassie Brighter

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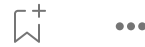
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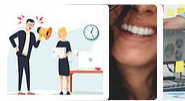
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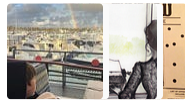
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